



♦ ♦ ♦ FOR THE BIBLE

TELLS ME SO... ♦ ♦ ♦



BOOK 2 — PATRIARCHS

*In order that those who are not more familiar with it  
may have instruction and guidance  
for reading the Old Testament with profit,  
I have prepared this preface to the best of the ability God has given me.*

*I beg and really caution every pious Christian  
not to be offended by the simplicity of the language  
and stories frequently encountered there,  
but fully realize that, however simple they may seem,  
these are the very words, works, judgments, and deeds  
of the majesty, power, and wisdom of the most high God.*

*For these are the Scriptures  
which make fools of all the wise and understanding,  
and are open only to the small and simple,  
as Christ says in Matthew 11:25.*

*Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings,  
and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things,  
as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored,  
in order that you may find that divine wisdom  
which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride.  
Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies,  
and to which the angel points the shepherds [Luke 2:12].  
Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure,  
Christ, who lies in them.<sup>1</sup>*

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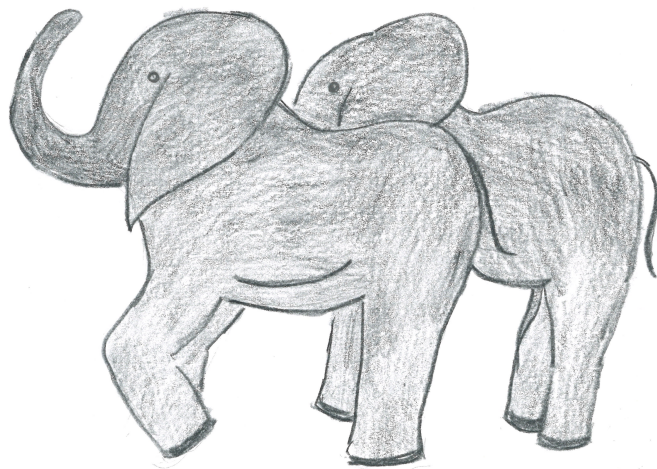
<sup>1</sup> Luther, M. (1999). [Luther's works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I](#). (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 35, p. 236). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.



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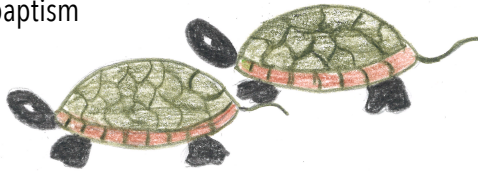
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*for Carina Lynn,*  
love Grandpa.

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## Noah / Sinfulness

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart. <sup>7</sup> So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. Genesis 6:5-8 (ESV)

The Bible reading above says that all people grew so sinful that their minds thought about sin all the time. This made God sad, even made Him sorry that it had become this way.

But why didn't He stop people from sinning? Why didn't He make us so that it was impossible for us to sin?

That's a hard question to answer, but part of the answer is this: Imagine two brothers. The first brother picks flowers for his mom without even thinking about it. There are no feelings when he does it, it is just something he does. Maybe he was trained to do it the way a dog sticks its paw out when the owner says "shake." But the second brother knows his mother loves flowers and so he picks them because he loves her. Isn't the second bunch of flowers better than the first?

God wants people to keep from sinning because they love Him, not because they don't know how to do anything else. That's partly why He didn't make us differently.

Allowing people to sin if that's what they want means that lots of people will sin, a whole lot. In the days of Noah it became so bad that God decided it had to end. God would send a flood to wash all the evil and wickedness away.

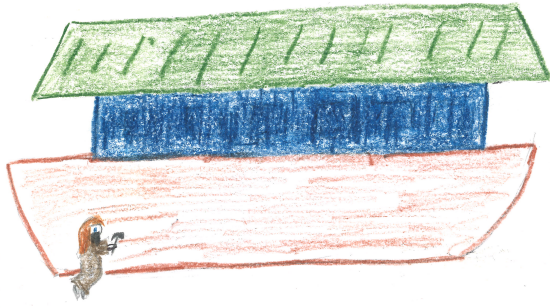
But if all people are sinful, do you know why Noah was saved? Our second reading answers that.

Listen to **Hebrews 11:7 "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household."**

Noah had faith. Someone with faith believes in God and believes God. They believe that sin is wrong because God says it is wrong. They are sorry for the sins they've done. They trust in Him to forgive those sins and to help them be like that second brother—to help them live lives of love.

Noah believed that sin was bad and Noah believe that God would send the Savior to forgive sin. Noah believed the same thing about Jesus that we believe today. What good news to know that even though sin makes God sad He still gave us Jesus to save us!





## Noah / Ark Building

Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. <sup>15</sup> This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. <sup>16</sup> Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. <sup>17</sup> For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.

Genesis 6:14-17

## **By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. Hebrews 11:7**

The second Bible reading for this devotion is the same as the last because we are still going to talk about Noah's faith. In Noah we see that faith is more than just a feeling, faith is action.



God told Noah to build a giant boat and Noah did. In Williamstown, Kentucky, some people did their best to follow the same directions God gave to Noah; they built an ark so that people can see what it might have looked like. It is 510 feet long and 51 feet high, higher than a four-story house!!

When we carefully read everything the Bible says about the ark we find that Noah had 120 years to build it. This would give him plenty of time to hire workers, get the wood, and put it all together and plenty of time to tell others about God; about His judgment on sin but also about His promise of forgiveness.

But remember, the ark was a ship made for giant oceans and it seems that he is building it far away from the shore. This was faith in action; everyday and every year even when everything seemed to stay the same, Noah was building. Can you imagine it?

Actually you can. As a believer you are a lot like Noah. You trust God's promise that He loves you even when you can't see that love. You trust His promise to keep you safe even when life ends.

Noah was kept safe from the flood in the ark but do you know how Noah is kept safe in Heaven? The same way as you! Noah is in Heaven because of Jesus, the exact same as you. In Jesus, no matter what comes, floods of water or floods of trouble, we are protected. He loves us, He already died for us, and He is alive forever and ever—just like we will be!

## Noah / Animals

Two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.

<sup>10</sup> And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. Genesis 7:9-10



"Two by two they went into the ark with Noah." That's what the Bible says.

But how did they all fit? Well, we can't answer that question completely because the Bible doesn't tell us but here are a two things we should remember:

1. Young animals take up less room and eat less food. Two baby elephants or hippos would be much easier to handle than adults, and
2. The Bible says "two of every kind." That means Noah wouldn't have needed two German Shepherds and two Huskies and two Chihuahuas and two of every other kind of dog. Because all those dogs can have puppies with each other, two ordinary "dogs" would have worked. (*Moms and dads, this could have applied to many animals we describe with the word "species". Cats, cattle, deer, etc.*)

Rather than Noah having to go out and catch them all, God led them all to the ark. He led them there to save them.

**If He did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials. 2 Peter 2:5 & 9**

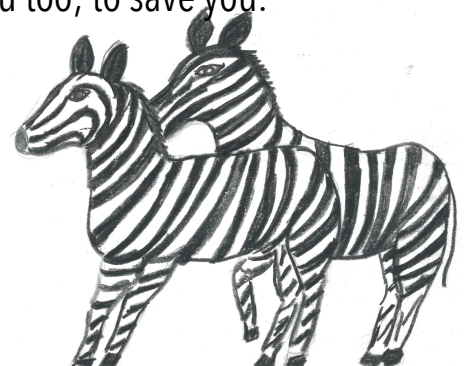
In the second Bible reading Peter says that "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly." Of all the people in the world to say this, Peter would certainly know.

Do you remember how Peter denied being one of Jesus' disciples, said he didn't even know who Jesus was? That was a very sad night, wasn't it? The good news for Peter was that Jesus didn't say the same about Peter.

Jesus loved Peter. Jesus never denied knowing Peter. Jesus forgave Peter's sin. That's why, when Peter was writing about Noah he could say "the Lord knows how to rescue."

Even if we don't have answers to every question, the Lord Jesus knows how to rescue you too!! He still went to the cross for Peter and He went there for you too; to save you.

*Yes! Jesus loves me!!*





## Noah / Flood / Destruction

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. <sup>12</sup> And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. Genesis 7:11-12



Finally the flood came. Water fell from the sky and water rose up from under the ground. What a sad day for God! He made everything good and perfect. He promises that He loves all people and wants them to be saved but now sin had ruined it so much that in order to save any faith in the Savior, God had to wash away all that unbelief.

This shows us how serious a thing sin is to God. It is terrible because it leads them away from Him and away from Heaven.

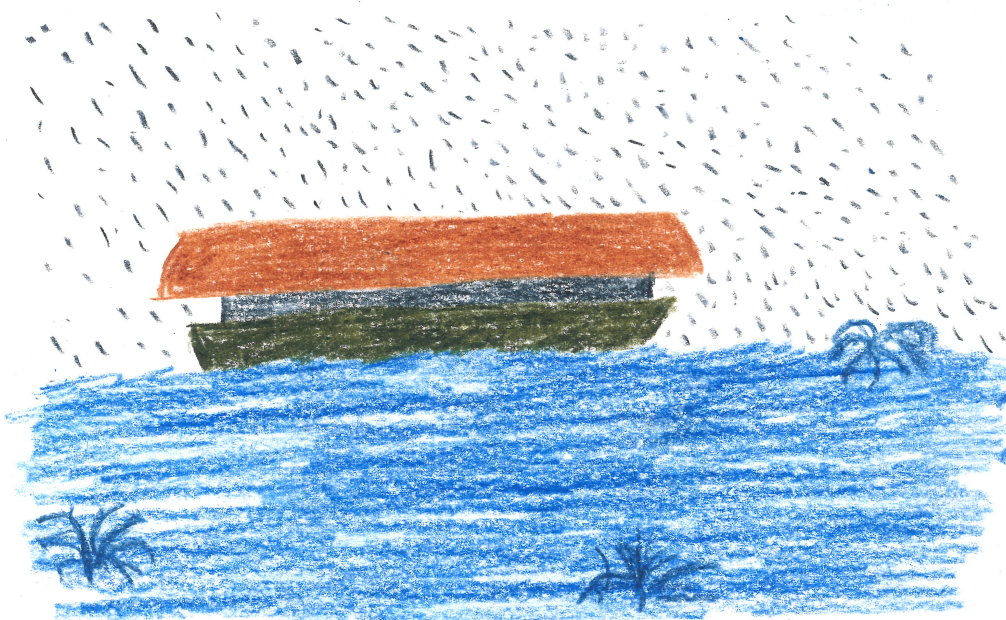
God sent the flood because He loved all the people who weren't even born yet, even you! If the flood hadn't have come, unbelief and sin would have kept growing, people would have stopped hearing His Word, parents would have stopped telling their children and then you would never ever have heard about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem or His death and resurrection at Jerusalem. Can you imagine never hearing about Christmas or Easter?!

God sent the flood out of loving concern for you, so that you could hear about Jesus, so that you could be saved. We are reminded of that truth in the second verse for today: **...God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all. 1 Timothy 2:3-6**

The second reading tells us the same thing one of my favorite songs tells us:

*Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak but He is strong.*

*Yes! Jesus loves me! Yes! Jesus loves me! Yes! Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so!*





## Noah / Flood / Baptism

The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. <sup>21</sup> And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. <sup>22</sup> Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. <sup>23</sup> He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. <sup>24</sup> And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days. Genesis 7:20-24

Do you remember what God used to wipe all the sin away? (*The water of the flood.*)

Safe in the ark, what lifted Noah above all that destruction? (*The water of the flood.*)

Isn't that interesting? The same thing which cleansed the world was the same thing that kept Noah safe from ruin. The same thing.

Peter says that Baptism is just like that. In the second reading Peter says that the flood is just like Baptism:

**1 Peter 3:20-21 God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. <sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

Jesus taught Peter what he needed to know and Jesus sent Peter out to God's people. Jesus told Peter to do two things; to baptize and to teach what Jesus had done.

About ten days later we hear Peter telling people to "Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38)

Peter says Baptism is just like the flood. The flood washed sin away while at the same time bringing Noah and the rest to a new beginning. Because Baptism gives us forgiveness of our sins, Baptism brings us to a new beginning. This is the beginning of life as God's child.

Peter says Baptism is connected to Easter, to Jesus' resurrection. Because Jesus died and rose for forgiveness that means that Baptism gives a "good conscience," there is nothing for us to be ashamed of because all that has been washed away.



Today's pastors are a lot like Peter because their job is to baptize and teach about Jesus.

*And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' Acts 22:16*

## Raven

At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made<sup>7</sup> and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Genesis 8:6-7



The flood lasted a long time. First it rained and the waters rose for forty days. Then it took a long time for the waters to go back down, after all, they were higher than the highest mountain. The ark floated for 150 days before it ran aground on a mountain.

But it still wasn't safe for people or animals. So Noah sent out a raven. A dove (next devotion) would need the seeds of growing plants to eat, the raven could eat many things and a raven wouldn't fly away as far as a hawk or an eagle might.

Noah let a raven loose but the Bible says it just flew back and forth. It seems the water wasn't down far enough for most of the other animals or Noah and his family. Now remember, this boat was designed to survive a world-wide flood, it wasn't designed like a cruise ship with windows and a sun-deck.

Noah and his family still had to wait and trust God that they would one day get off the ark and be on dry land again. How hard that must have been! How disappointing when the raven didn't find a place, when it just flying back and forth, back and forth.

The person who wrote the second Bible reading seems to have known what that was like. He talks about crying for mercy and being surrounded by death. How scary!

**Psalm 116:7-9 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. <sup>8</sup> For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; <sup>9</sup> I will walk before the Lord in the Land of the Living.**

But in the verses above we hear his faith speaking. God will deliver him, dry his tears, even bring him to something called "The Land of the Living."

Do you know where that land is? It is in Heaven. Do you know why you can trust that one day, no matter how long it takes, you will be walking around in that land? Because Jesus lived and died and rose for you!

*Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong!*



## Dove

Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. <sup>9</sup> But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. <sup>10</sup> He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. <sup>11</sup> And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. <sup>12</sup> Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore. Genesis 8:8-12



After the raven, Noah sent out a dove. The dove didn't find any food or place to rest so it came back to the ark and Noah brought it back inside. He waited another week.

The he sent it out again. Again it returned but this time it had a fresh olive leaf in its beak! Plants and trees were growing again!!

It still came back to him. So Noah brought it back into the ark and waited another week. Seven more days! I wonder if the animals were getting restless?

When he let the dove go a third time it did not come back. It found enough seeds to eat and branches to rest in. Finally Noah himself looked out from an opening in the roof. He had been in the ark and hadn't seen dry land for over year now.

But there it was, just as God had said it would be. Now Noah and his family could live in peace, telling their children and grandchildren about God's work: about Adam and Eve, about how bad sin was, and especially about the promise of a Savior which God had made to Eve.

This Savior would one day come to bring all people to a perfect place of rest. He would pay for our sins and remove the cause of sin; He would make us holy again in God's sight.

That home in Heaven is yours, God has it ready and waiting for you and for all His people. One day all sin and sadness will come to an end and we will be safe with God.

*Jesus loves me, this I know!*

**How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! <sup>2</sup> My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. <sup>3</sup> Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at Your altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God. Psalm 84:1-3**

## Rainbow

"I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember My covenant that is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. Genesis 9:13-15

Were there rainbows before the flood? Was there even rain before the flood? It seems like the answer to both questions is "no" but we don't know for sure. During the flood God may have caused a change in the air above the earth (the "atmosphere") so that now we have rain and rainbows when before they didn't. "May have," there's just lots that the Bible doesn't tell us.

What the Bible does tell us is that now there are rainbows. Do you ever see pictures or even flags with rainbows on them? Now days people use rainbows to remind them of all sorts of things but when we see them we can remember that God has promised that the rainbows in the sky will be reminders of His mercy.

God never forgets and God never changes what He promises and that's a very good thing. Floods still come but they won't be world-wide. The sin and sadness that caused the flood still comes too. There are only two ways to get rid of all sadness and all sin once and for all.

One way would be to get rid of all people. Even Noah was a sinner. Even we are too. But if God got rid of all people there would no one left for Him to love. That way is no good.

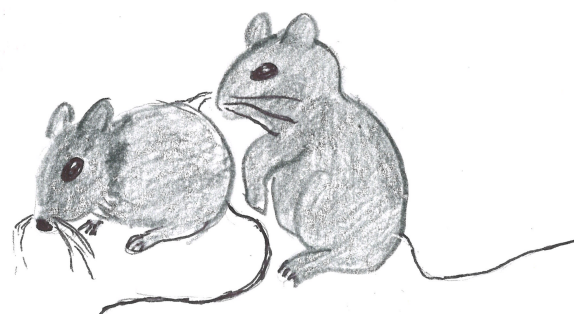
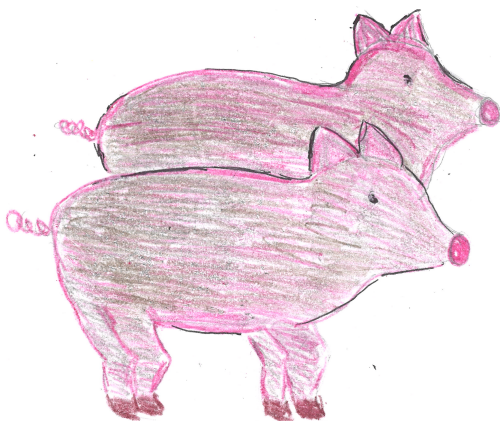
The other way, the only other way, is to have someone be punished for them all.

That's the way God chose. That's what Jesus was sent to do and that's what Jesus did.

Let's think about a rainbow. A bow is used to shoot arrows. And so a bow is weapon, it's something used to fight against enemies. When God placed His bow in the sky He told Noah and everyone who came after that even though we are sinners, He would not fight against us.

Instead God placed His Son on the cross. The Father loves His Son so much but He loves you too! Instead of fighting against sinners like you and me, God gave Himself. God gave Jesus.

**God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8**



## Babel

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup> So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11:1-9

If you had walked off the ark with Noah, you probably would have remembered that lesson for the rest of your life. All those people gone. Some of them would have been friends and neighbors. As you remembered the destruction you would also have remembered your days on the ark; how God protected that ship when nothing else could have survived.

When you got married and had children you would have told them about it too. You would have told them how bad sin can grow, how powerful God really is, and how He saved you because of His grace.

Would your children have told their grandchildren? Would your grandchildren have told your great-grandchildren? How long would it have been before the sin grew bad enough that people stopped telling and stopped caring about God?

That's what we find in this Bible story: the Tower of Babel. Here we find a large group of people who gather together with plans to disobey God. Rather than spread out across the whole earth they want to stay together and build a tower so high that it reaches the sky.

If this is successful, what plans for sin would be next? How long before no one knew about Him and His promised Savior.

God didn't let their plans happen. God confused their languages. He made it sound like everyone was babbling. Now they could not work together to sin. Now they would spread out and sin would not be like a giant tower.

The sinful way that people are means that they always want to disobey God. The loving way that God is means that He always wants to save them.





Can you see and hear that in the second reading? It's from Luke 23:34, when they were crucifying Jesus. It says **"And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"**

Instead of being angry for all the pain, He prayed for forgiveness for those people.

Have you been naughty lately, not listening to your parents or mean to someone else? Jesus prayed for forgiveness for you too; and because the Father loves His Son, He answers that prayer. You are forgiven and you are loved.

*For the Bible tells me so.*



## Babel / Pentecost

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup> So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11:1-9

The Bible says that up until now all the people of the world had been speaking the same language. Adam, all the people of Noah's time, even all the people building the Tower of Babel; they all spoke the same language.

God confused languages because those last people were working together to sin. From the Tower of Babel people spread out across the world marrying and having children. In the days when Jesus walked the earth there were many *many* different languages. Scientists say that there are more 6,000 languages in the world today!

But what if you had some really good news that just had to be shared? News that was meant for more than just the people who talk like you talk? How could you share that news with someone whose language you don't know and who doesn't speak your language? Will they have to live their whole life not knowing your really good news? Let's call that the "Tower of Babel Problem."

That problem faced the world in the days of Jesus. How He was born and lived and died and rose again is the best news of all but most of the world could not understand His disciples when they were going out to tell that story.

God fixed the "Tower of Babel Problem" on a day we call "Pentecost." Instead of letting everyone speak the same language again, on that day He made Jesus' disciples able to speak many different languages. Now they could tell the world about Jesus. They could tell about the cross and about how He rose again. They could tell the world about forgiveness and about Heaven.

Part of that section of the Bible says: **Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." Acts 2:11**

You and I have some Tower of Babel in us. We don't speak the same language as everyone else, maybe there are even kids you know who speak differently. But you and I and those other kids have Pentecost in us too. The message of Jesus has gone out to all the world in all the languages of the world.

## Job: Husband, Father, Priest

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. <sup>2</sup> There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. <sup>3</sup> He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. <sup>4</sup> His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually. <sup>6</sup> Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. Job 1:1-6



Today we're going to meet a man named Job. We think he lived about 4,000 years ago and even though he isn't an ancestor of Jesus, his story is important enough that God saw fit to include it in the Bible.

At first, we meet a man who has what most people want. He seems happily married. He is very rich and successful. He is well-respected by those around him. He has ten children.

Job is a good man, maybe one of the best men we find in the Old Testament. One of the reasons we can say this is because of his prayers. Job prays for his family even though they are grown up and moved out and old enough to pray for themselves. After all, he is still their father. He makes a habit of going to God on behalf of his children.

But where would Job have learned such a thing? Did his father teach it to him? We don't know. In the end this kind of thing is learned from God. He teaches us about loving others when He first promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior. When they saw what God didn't do to them but what He promised to do for them, they saw what a loving father does.

The man who wrote the second Bible reading is a man named Paul. Once, Paul was a very bad man, he would have arrested you and your parents for having a book like this that teaches about Jesus! Paul learned about love and forgiveness when God came to him. Paul turned around and showed that to the man named Timothy to whom he was writing. Paul wrote this: **I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people. 1 Timothy 2:1**

Paul reminds Timothy to pray for other people. We get to do the same thing! A grandparent who is in the hospital, a loved one who is in the military, someone who is sick, someone who is very sad; we can pray for them knowing that God will hear our prayer and God will do what is best.

Do you know why God will hear? Because of Jesus!

## Job's Heartbreak

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." <sup>10</sup> But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. Job 2:9-10

Job's story started off great. He had money and family and he was healthy but the story gets real sad real fast. The first reading from yesterday's devotion said that the devil was also there.

Thieves steal everything he has. Then all ten of his children are in a terrible accident and all of them die. Then he gets a terribly painful disease.

Just imagine! A broken piggy-bank, broken health, and a broken heart! His wife thinks things are so bad that he should curse God and die. (Remember, she is as poor as he is and has just lost ten children as well.)

But his children are not lost forever, he will see them again in Heaven. And God takes care of the poor and the sick just as He takes care of the rich and the healthy. So, Job doesn't do what his wife thinks he should do. He keeps trusting God.

We don't always get what we ask for from God, do we. Sometimes its little things like toys or electronics. We really want them and we might even remember to pray for them but then Mom or Dad say "no." Other times its important things. Some of us have family but who died even though we asked God to make them better.

Our second reading talks about that; **Hebrews 11:1-2 "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation."**

Faith isn't knowing that God will give us what we want; faith is knowing that God will give us what is best.

How can we be sure? Think of Mary the mother of Jesus. Do you think she prayed that He would be found innocent and let go? Even on the cross don't you think she prayed that somehow He wouldn't die?

There God did what was best for her and for the world. John 3:16 tells is what He did: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus is how we can be sure, sure that God will give us what is best. He already did!

## Job's Comfort

Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Job 13:15

Job's friends came to comfort him in his sorrow. But they didn't know what to say! After all, why do bad things happen to good people?

Maybe Job wasn't a good man and a good father! Maybe he was hiding some ugly secret that only God knew about. Maybe God was punishing Job for his sins.

Uh uh. God doesn't do that. God punished Jesus for Job's sins. God will not punish believers for theirs.

How do we know Job was a believer? Look at his words above. In the first verse Job says that even if things were so bad that he dies, he is still determined to trust in God.

His friends want him to search his own life and his own heart and find what he did wrong and then make up for it. His friends want him to find comfort in himself.

Uh uh! If there's one thing Job knows it's that he can't comfort himself with his own behavior. No. His only comfort is in the second reading for today.

**Job 19:23-27 "Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! <sup>24</sup> Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! <sup>25</sup> For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. <sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, <sup>27</sup> whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!**

Job believes in the Redeemer. A Redeemer who will fix things so that even when Job dies he will still see God with his own eyes; he and his children.

They'll be together again. And they won't be sick and they won't be starving.

A Redeemer is someone who gives himself for someone else. Do you know who has given Himself for you?

Jesus has. The promise of Jesus and all that Jesus gives was Job's comfort. That same promise is the most important thing we can hear and know.

God won't judge you by how much money you've saved or by how healthy you are. God judges all people in Jesus. Those who trust in Him as their Redeemer will be saved!

*They are weak but He is strong!*



## Job's Restoration

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. <sup>11</sup> Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. <sup>12</sup> And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. <sup>13</sup> He had also seven sons and three daughters. <sup>14</sup> And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Kerenhappuch. <sup>15</sup> And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. <sup>16</sup> And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. <sup>17</sup> And Job died, an old man, and full of days. Job 42:10-17

Job's story gets worse before it gets better. After his friends say that God must be punishing him and after Job says "no, that's not true" then Job turns to God and starts complaining

Job complains that he hasn't done anything wrong, so he asks why these bad things are happening. After going on for pages and pages, finally God answers him. This is where it probably got scary for Job.

God answered Job from a whirlwind, a storm or tempest of some sort. God points to some of the things He does everyday; making rain and sun, feeding wild animals, bringing the tides in and out, even putting the stars in their proper places.

This makes Job realize that he is wrong to complain about what God is doing but it also reminds him that God has absolutely promised to take care of him! After all, if God can handle the giant stars in the sky He can certainly handle the problems in our lives. in love.

In good times and in bad times Job believes and trusts in God's love.

In the second reading God is talking again. He asks if a mom can forget about her babies. He says that even if that does happen, He won't forget about you. How can you know that this is true? God says "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

**Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. <sup>16</sup> Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands. Isaiah 49:15-16**

Engraving is done with something sharp and when something is engraved it isn't erased. When Jesus was crucified you and your name were written forever on God's hands. He really does love you that much. He will not and cannot forget you!

*For the Bible tells me so!*





## Call of Abraham

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." <sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Genesis 12:1-4

Today we meet a man named Abraham and his wife named Sarah. They lived at about the same time as Job and are very important people in God's plan of salvation.

When we first meet them, their names are a little different; he is called "Abram" and she is called "Sarai". They seem to be ordinary people just like you and me. He is 75 years old, she is 65, and even though they have been married for a long time they don't have any children.

Then God comes with promise after promise. He's going to give them children and grandchildren; so many that one day enough people to make a country will come from these two people! And speaking of countries, God will give them one of their own; land for them and for their family. But best of all if that the promised Savior would be born from their family!

This is the Savior promised to Adam and Eve. (Remember them?) This is the Savior Noah believed in. This is the Redeemer that Job trusted in when everything else seemed hopeless. God said this Savior would be born from Abraham and Sarah's family.

What exciting news! Abraham and Sarah packed their things to move to the place that God promised to give them. Maybe they wanted to get there fast before the baby came!

What they didn't know is that God would have them wait for a while before that baby would be born. God would make sure that everyone knew their baby was a miracle and a gift from God.

Here are words you may have heard before: **And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Luke 2:10** These are Christmas words. These are words about Jesus. He is the miracle baby because even though His mother is Mary, His father is God.

Jesus' birth was good news for everyone. He is the Savior God told Adam and Eve about, the promise Noah carried with him in the ark. Jesus is the reason God stopped the sin at Babel from getting even worse and Jesus was Job's comfort when everything else was lost.

Jesus is even the good news of great joy for us!

## Abraham & Sarah in Egypt

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. <sup>11</sup> When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, <sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake." <sup>14</sup> When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. <sup>16</sup> And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. <sup>17</sup> But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. <sup>18</sup> So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go." <sup>20</sup> And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had. Genesis 12:10-20

Things probably seemed pretty good to Abraham and Sarah. God had promised them children and a land of their own. He had even promised that the Savior was going to come from their own family.

Things probably seemed pretty good; until the famine.

A famine is when there isn't enough food for everyone. Maybe there wasn't enough rain for the plants, maybe there was too much, maybe bugs wrecked them all. Famines happen in many ways but they happen because of only one reason: sin. The world isn't perfect and sometimes we see that in bad weather and sometimes we see that when there isn't enough food.

A famine happened in the land Abraham and Sarah were living and so they had to go the land of Egypt to find food. There they ran into more sin, some of it was their own.

Sarah was a very beautiful woman, so beautiful that the men of Egypt wanted her to be their wife. They took her from Abraham; that was sinful.

But when they did, Abraham didn't protect her. He was afraid that if he tried they might just kill him and take her anyway. So Abraham lied about her being his wife. That was also sinful.

It looks like even Abraham and Sarah needed a Savior! Thankfully God had promised to send one and was in the process of arranging a family and a country for the Savior to be born in. God protected Sarah even when Abraham didn't, God didn't let anything bad happen to her. If He promised to have the Savior born from their family do you think He'd let Abraham be killed or Sarah be kidnapped?

**Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.**  
**Isaiah 41:10**

The second Bible reading reminds us that God has promised to be with us no matter where we go. Sometimes it's hard to remember this, we might be hungry or afraid like Abraham and Sarah were. But in Jesus we see proof of God's love and proof that no matter how scary things may seem, that God's going to watch over us.

After all, He gave us Jesus, didn't He?

## Abraham & Lot

<sup>1</sup> So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. <sup>2</sup> Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup> And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup> to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, <sup>6</sup> so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, <sup>7</sup> and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. <sup>8</sup> Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. <sup>9</sup> Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." <sup>10</sup> And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup> Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Genesis 13:1-12

When Abraham and Sarah pack up to move to the land God promised them, they had company. Abraham's nephew tagged along. His name was Lot.

Both Abraham and Lot raised farm animals; sheep and goats, probably some cows too. Those kinds of animals need lots of grass to eat, which means they need lots of land to grow the grass.

Sometime after they moved their animals were eating each other's grass. The people who worked for Abraham and Lot were arguing with each other. Abraham and Lot realized they needed to move further apart.

So they went up on a hill or mountain. Abraham gave Lot first pick; he said that if Lot chose the land to the east, Abraham would live on the other side to the west. The land to the east looked best, it had plenty of green grass. Lot chose this. Here is where he would live and where he would raise the two daughters he and his wife had.

But near the land which Lot chose were two cities that were becoming famous for being very sinful. This would become a bad thing for Lot and his family. We'll see that later in this book.

What about Abraham? Would he be able to feed his animals when Lot had the best land? He might have been worrying about that because soon after Lot left God came to Abraham to reassure him. God wouldn't forget the promises He made. God could take care Abraham anywhere.

Listen to Mark 4:39. **And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.**

A boat that was sinking. A terrible storm had come. It looked like God had forgotten about Peter and the rest. It looked that way because Jesus was asleep. He wasn't awake worrying and crying like everyone else.

What do you think? If Jesus was right there in the boat could God have forgotten about Peter? Of course not. No matter what would happen, they had Jesus.

When Jesus died on the cross it certainly looked like God had forgotten everyone. But Jesus rose again. This is God's promise to never leave or forget you.

## Blood covenant

And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." <sup>8</sup> But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" <sup>9</sup> He said to him, "Bring Me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Genesis 15:7-9 (ESV)

Abraham had many adventures as a believer. Once, his nephew Lot was captured by enemy armies and Abraham went and rescued him. Another time he met a mysterious priest of God and worshipped with this person.

Many years had passed since God had promised them a child of their own but they still didn't have a baby. Abraham and Sarah started to doubt God's word. They had a nephew who lived in Damascus, they thought that maybe they should adopt him.

"No," said God. "The two of you, Abraham and Sarah, will have a son of your own." Still, they were now very old, much older than most people are when they have babies. How could they be sure of this?

One night God took Abraham outside and made a "blood covenant" with Abraham. This was a special kind of promise people would make back then where the person said "I will keep my promise even if it kills me." God made the promise, Abraham just watched. Once again God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child and that an entire nation would come from their descendants and that the Savior would eventually be born in that family.

God is the maker of life. He is eternal. He cannot die. So can Him saying He would die in order to keep a promise He made to you?

He has!

But how can God die? If He allows Himself to be a person just like you, and if He follows all the rules our bodies follow, then He could die. He could die if someone hurt Him badly enough, if someone killed Him.

That's Jesus. God is eternal and God cannot die but when Jesus became the son of Mary, then He could; in fact, then He did. In Jesus God made you the promise written in the second Bible reading. In Jesus God made a "blood promise" to clean you from all your sins.

**The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7**

And if you are clean from sin, one day you will be in Heaven with God forever.

*Yes! Jesus loves me!*



## Hagar

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. <sup>2</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. Genesis 16:1-2 (ESV)

Sometimes when people make us promises it is hard to believe them. In fact, the better the promise is, the harder it is to believe, isn't it?

This is how it was for Abraham and Sarah. He was 75 and she was 65 when God first came promising them a child of their own. That was in Genesis 12.

Now in Genesis 16 ten years have passed. He is 85, she is 75. That's very old to have babies. They started to think that it wasn't going to happen and that God wasn't going to keep His promise after all.

Then they had a really bad idea. What if Abraham had a baby with Hagar, a lady who worked for them and a lady who was not Abraham's wife? Sarah could adopt the baby as her own and they could pretend that nothing was wrong.

It didn't work. Hagar did have a baby but when Sarah saw Abraham with a son that wasn't hers, she was very sad. She treated Hagar and the boy badly. Abraham didn't know what to do; he loved Sarah but now he loved his son from Hagar. Do you think he started to love Hagar too?

What a mess! Remember, this all happened because they didn't believe God could give a baby to them when they were so old. They forgot that God can do anything.

It is like that in the second Bible reading. **Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Mark 9:24**

Those are the words of a man who came to Jesus because his son was sick. He asked Jesus to heal the boy but he admitted that it was hard to believe that Jesus could. The better the promise is, the harder it is to believe, isn't it?

God keeps all the promises He makes because nothing is impossible with God. The best promises He has made to you are promises of love and forgiveness and Heaven. God keeps these promises with Jesus, the Savior who would be born from the family that God promised to Abraham and Sarah.

## Circumcision

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, <sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, <sup>4</sup> "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." Genesis 17:1-8 (ESV)

More time passed. Now Abraham was 99 years old, Sarah was 89. Now they are way too old to ever have babies. Now it is absolutely impossible. It sounds like the perfect time for God to begin to do what only He can do, doesn't it?

First God came to Abraham to tell him about something new, something called "circumcision." This was a thing God wanted His people to do where they would cut away a little bit of skin on all the boys so that there would be a scar. Then, every time a husband and wife were thinking about having babies, they would see that scar and they could remember that children are blessings from God and that one day even God would be born as a child.

Abraham was the very first man that was circumcised because of this promise of God. This went on for 2,000 years! Moses, Joshua, David; all of them were circumcised so that all of them could remember children are God's gift and He promised Eve that the Savior would be born like any other child.

The second Bible reading shows us that those days are over. **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. Galatians 5:6**

In that reading, God says that now that Jesus has been born, the circumcision reminder isn't needed anymore. We believe that Jesus really was born and that in Him we are saved.

Abraham had God's promise. He watched when God made him that "blood promise" and now he carried a mark on his own body that God would do exactly what God had promised to do.

We don't insist on circumcising people now days, but we do insist on baptizing them because Jesus insisted on it when He sent His disciples out to His Church. Even if we were too young to remember being baptized, God's promise is just a good. That's a promise which is dependent on Him instead of us.

*Little ones to Him belong. They are weak but He is strong!*

## Three visitors

And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.<sup>2</sup> He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth<sup>3</sup> and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant."  
Genesis 18:1-3

This is the second time in one year that God came to Abraham. He is still 99 years old and still waiting for Sarah to be pregnant. They don't know it yet but that time is getting close!

Genesis 18 says that God appeared to Abraham and it says that what Abraham saw was three men. He (or They) had come to tell Abraham and Sarah some very good news. God told them that one year from now they would have that baby in their arms.

But remember, Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 89 years old! Can you imagine someone that old having a baby? Sarah certainly couldn't. She was inside their tent listening as God talked with Abraham outside and she laughed when she heard about this baby.

She laughed because she didn't believe it was possible. She'd been wanting and trying to have a baby for a long time now, more than 50 years at least! Was this going to happen now that she was 89?

Here's something else we read in the Bible: **Luke 1:36-37 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God."**

The second Bible reading tells us why this was going to happen. That second reading is from a time when the angel Gabriel was talking with Mary. Gabriel just told Mary that she would have a baby even though she wasn't married to anyone.

Mary wondered how this could be. Gabriel told her that God would be the father of her child. Gabriel also told her that her old relative Elizabeth was going to have a baby also. Nothing is impossible with God.

Sarah would have her baby who would be one of God's believers. Elizabeth was one of those believers too. So was Mary.

And Mary's baby? Well, that was Jesus the Savior. He's how we know that God loves us.  
*Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so!*

## Abraham pleads for Sodom & Gomorrah

Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"<sup>24</sup> Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?<sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"<sup>26</sup> And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."<sup>27</sup> Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.<sup>28</sup> Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there."<sup>29</sup> Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it."<sup>30</sup> Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there."<sup>31</sup> He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it."<sup>32</sup> Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."<sup>33</sup> And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. Genesis 18:23-33

When Abraham was 99, God paid him a visit. God had two things to tell Abraham; first, that the baby he and Sarah had waited so long for would be here in less than a year. The second thing was that it was time to punish the sin of the people living in Sodom and Gomorrah.

But that's where Lot lived! Remember how Lot had chosen the best land to live in? That was near these cities which were famous for their lives of unbelief and sin.

When God told Abraham what He was going to do, Abraham begged God for even more mercy. Abraham asked "What if 50 believers live there? Would they be destroyed too? Could the cities be saved for the sake of 50 of God's people?"

God answered "yes." For 50 believers He would spare everyone. Next Abraham asked for 45. God said "Yes." Then 40, and again, "Yes." 30? 20? 10? "Yes." "Yes." "Yes."

**This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:3-4**

God wants all people to be saved. Even though He knew there weren't ten believers between the two cities, God promised He wouldn't have done it if there had been. As bad as sin is, God wants to save people even more.

What a great thing for Abraham to do! Even though those people were very evil, Abraham didn't want them to die anymore than God. While both Abraham and God wanted people to believe and be saved, only God could do anything to save them or anyone.

God saves us by faith in Jesus. That's what the second reading means when it says "knowledge of the truth." You have this "knowledge", you believe in Jesus, you have faith. This is exactly what God wants for you and for all your family and friends.

## Visitors for Lot

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth<sup>2</sup> and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square."<sup>3</sup> But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.<sup>4</sup> But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.<sup>5</sup> And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."<sup>6</sup> Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him,<sup>7</sup> and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.<sup>8</sup> Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."<sup>9</sup> But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down.<sup>10</sup> But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door.<sup>11</sup> And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.<sup>12</sup> Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place."<sup>13</sup> For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it."<sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. Genesis 19:1-14

God promised Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if even ten believers were there. Sadly there weren't. Lot lived there with his wife and two daughters. That might be four people. But the daughters' husbands just laughed at these things.

Like at the flood, in order to keep sin from ruining the faith of God's believers, eventually God gets rid of the sin. That's what He would do at Sodom and Gomorrah.

And things were really bad at Sodom and Gomorrah. The two visitors who came to Lot to help him escape got the attention of the people living there.

Who were these strangers? What business did they have? Why weren't they like us? Why don't they behave like us? The people of Sodom and Gomorrah pounded on Lot's door demanding that he send the visitors out to them. They had terribly sinful things they wanted to do to Lot's visitors. They were going to force everyone to be like they were.

But God blinded those bad people so that they couldn't see Lot's family or his visitors. This helped them get ready to escape.

This is a very sad part of the Bible. It shows us how dangerous sin is because in the end it doesn't want to be stopped. We see the same thing in the second Bible reading.

**Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!**

Jesus is the one talking there, He's crying because He doesn't want any of the people of Jerusalem to be lost but He says that they didn't want to be saved.

Sin is that bad. It is like poison to the gift of faith.

And thank God that these two readings aren't all sad news. In Genesis we see God acting to save those who believe. In Matthew we see the same. Jesus is in the city of Jerusalem to suffer for our sins, to rise from the dead, and to save all who believe. Thank You Jesus!

## Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, & Mrs. Lot

<sup>1</sup>As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city." <sup>16</sup> But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. <sup>17</sup> And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away." <sup>18</sup> And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords. <sup>19</sup> Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. <sup>20</sup> Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!" <sup>21</sup> He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. <sup>22</sup> Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. <sup>23</sup> The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. <sup>24</sup> Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. <sup>25</sup> And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. <sup>26</sup> But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. Genesis 19:15-26

God promised Abraham that if there were just ten believers in Sodom and Gomorrah both cities would be saved. But there weren't. Still, God didn't want His believers to die the same as the unbelievers so He worked to save Lot's family.

They had to hurry. Soon fiery sulfur would fall like rain; like stuff from a volcano, but God would wait until His people were safe.

When they were, down it came, one terrible consequence of their terrible sins. As they fled, God gave them a command: Don't Look Back! Don't watch their destruction, don't stare at it, don't even peek. Just go. Get away. Be safe.

Would you have been curious to see what this destruction looked like? I think I would have been. Still, God said not to look, not to watch.

Lot's wife didn't obey, she must have been curious; she looked back. Instantly she stopped moving! She stopped talking, she stopped looking. She turned into a pillar, or tower, of salt.

Wow! Doesn't that seem sad? All she did was look. But then, all Adam and Eve did was eat from the tree God said not to eat from...

That's the problem with sin, we usually think that it isn't that big of a deal. Obviously God thinks differently. He thinks differently because He knows how much each sin costs to pay for.

**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23**

Look at the second reading. Lot's wife died because she sinned. Still, that free gift of God has been given for all; for her and for me and for you. In a world full of sin this free gift of God is good news to hear!

## Birth of Isaac / Sending away of Ishmael

<sup>1</sup> The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. <sup>2</sup> And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. <sup>4</sup> And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup> And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." <sup>7</sup> And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." <sup>8</sup> And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. <sup>10</sup> So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." <sup>11</sup> And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. <sup>13</sup> And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." <sup>14</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. <sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup> And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup> Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." <sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. <sup>20</sup> And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. <sup>21</sup> He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. Genesis 21:1-21

It has been a very busy year for Abraham! He was 99 when God told him to be circumcised. Since then he had to rescue Lot when an enemy army captured Lot. Then there was all that business with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Finally, sometime after Abraham's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the promised baby was born. Sarah was 90 years old when she had the baby. It was a boy, just like God had said it would be.

Remember that other baby which Abraham was the father of, another boy whose mother worked for them? Now that Sarah had her own son she said it was time that those two to leave. After Abraham sent them on their way God came to that mother. He promised to bless them and to see them safely to a new home.

Sarah named her baby boy "Isaac." It means laughter. That's what she did a year ago when she heard God say that she was going to have him and now that he was here she laughed with joy that God could give such a miracle to a 90 year old woman and her 100 year old husband.

Even though Abraham and Sarah could never have children by themselves and even though they were way too old to have one now, God kept His promise. In the second Bible reading Jesus made a promise to His disciples.



**Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. John 16:20**

Jesus said those words on a Thursday, just a few hours before He was captured and just the night before He was killed on the cross. His capture and His death would make the disciples very sad. It even made them weep. People who hated Jesus celebrated. They thought that they had won some kind of victory.

But the victory went to Jesus because three days after He died on the cross He was alive again. He died and was buried to pay for the sins of the whole world. Because He rose we can be absolutely sure that He paid for everything. Sorrow over Jesus' death has forever turned to joy!

## Sacrifice of Isaac

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup> He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." <sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. <sup>5</sup> Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." <sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. <sup>7</sup> And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. <sup>9</sup> When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>12</sup> He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." <sup>13</sup> And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Genesis 22:1-13

The Bible just says that this happened "sometime later." It was probably about 13 years or so. What happened was this: God told Abraham to take that son Abraham loved and to kill him.

Doesn't that sound horrible? But that's what God said. Remember, this is the same Abraham who doubted God's promise about this son. Would Abraham doubt the same promise now?

It doesn't seem like it this time. That's what God said and to that's what Abraham started to do. He got everything he would need and off he went with Isaac. When they got to the place God told him about, Abraham built an altar, arranged the wood, tied Isaac up, and laid him on top of it all.

Then he took that knife in his hand, raised it up, and...and before he brought it down God stopped him. No. Abraham would not have to give up his son. Nearby there was a sheep. It would be sacrificed in place of Isaac.

We don't know all the reasons why God would do such a thing. Most of the time His ways aren't very clear, even to believers! It's a good thing His promises are clear, isn't it?

But when God first talks to Abraham about all of this, He does it in a very interesting way. He said this: "take your son, your only son whom you love..." Doesn't that sound a lot like the words of the second Bible reading, the words of John 3:16?

**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16**

Abraham didn't give up his son and Isaac didn't die as a sacrifice; but Jesus did. God the Father actually did what Abraham didn't do, and Jesus actually did what Isaac didn't do. The second reading even tells us why.

Thanks be to God that He did everything, no matter how hard, so that we would be saved!

## Burial of Sarah

Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. <sup>2</sup> And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Genesis 23:1-2

Genesis 23 tells us that when Sarah died Abraham found a place to bury her body, he bought it so that no one else would ever come and move her. She was 127 years old. Isaac would have been 37.

With a place to bury her, now Abraham had a place where he could go when he was sad. Sarah had been a good wife. I wonder if Abraham ever went to where she was buried and thanked God for putting her in his life? I know lots of people now days who do that when they visit the grave of their husband or wife.

Lets look at something really neat and really comforting. Do you remember how often Sarah seemed to doubt God's promises? Remember that whole mess with the lady who worked for them? That was Sarah's idea. Remember how she laughed when God said she'd become a mother when she was 90? It would be easy to remember Sarah as someone who doubted a lot. It'd be easy to remember her as a sinner.

But look at the second Bible reading and look at how the Bible remembers her. There isn't a single mention of her sins, only her faith.

**Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.**

Do you know why? It's because her sins are all forgiven and when the Bible says that sins are forgiven it's like the Bible doesn't even remember them anymore.

It is like that because it is true. When God forgives sins they are taken away, even the memory of them is gone.

The same is true of all our sins. Not only does God forgive them, He doesn't even remember them! When we die we will rest in peace like Sarah waiting for the day Jesus comes back to raise us just like He raised Himself.

## Finding of Rebekah

<sup>1</sup> Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. <sup>2</sup> And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, <sup>3</sup> that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, <sup>4</sup> but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

<sup>10</sup> Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. <sup>11</sup> And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. <sup>12</sup> And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. <sup>13</sup> Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. <sup>14</sup> Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master." Genesis 24:1-14 (ESV)

It was time for Isaac to become a husband and a father, but who should he marry? Who could he trust to take care of the children who would one day be the family of Jesus?

Abraham looked around and decided to look somewhere else. He asked his most trusted worker to do this important job for them and he sent him back to where Abraham's family and friends were to look for a nice lady there.

But how do you find someone nice and good when you don't know anyone? That was the challenge Abraham gave to his servant.

This is what his servant did: first he prayed for God's help. Next, rather than look for the prettiest girl he decided to look for the kindest. He decided he would start asking girls for a drink of water for himself and he asked God that He would make it so that the girl who gave him water and who offered to get water for all his camels would be the girl God wanted for Isaac.

It sounds weird at first but it was really pretty smart. There were ten camels and each camel can easily drink ten gallons of water. He was looking for a girl who would volunteer to get 100 gallons of water for a stranger. Without God's help this would be a hard girl to find.

**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. John 13:34**

Here Jesus says that love for each other is how we show who we are. We show love for one another when we help carry gallons of milk or other groceries and when we are nice to a kid who is a stranger.

"Just as I have love you," said Jesus. And He has loved us, hasn't He? Thank God He has!  
*Jesus love me! This I know. For the Bible tells me so!*

## Character of Rebekah

Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. <sup>16</sup> The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. <sup>17</sup> Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." <sup>18</sup> She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. <sup>19</sup> When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." <sup>20</sup> So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. <sup>21</sup> The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not. Genesis 24:15-21

Abraham's servant made his plan and he prayed to God to bless it. The Bible tells us that before he had finished his prayer along came a girl. "Here goes nothing," he might have thought.

He asked her for a drink, just for himself, he didn't even mention his camels. She would have the stuff needed to get the water. She answered very respectfully and she offered to get water for all his camels too!

Genesis 24 tells us more about her. A beautiful girl like her would have lots of guys who want to get to know her but after beauty the Bible tells us that she was a virgin; she was honoring and obeying God's commands about marriage.

Then, as she gets water for him, we see that she is kind and generous and hard working. When she is asked about her family she is very respectful toward her mom and dad.

She sounds like the perfect lady to be Isaac's wife and a mother in the family God would send the Savior from! Rebekah truly was a humble person.

**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Philippians 2:5-6**

Today's second Bible reading says the Jesus humbled Himself. But it's not that Jesus was like Rebekah; instead, because Jesus is God and has always been, Rebekah was like Jesus.

Jesus didn't cling to His place in Heaven. It is perfect there, you are never sad or hungry and no one can ever hurt you. Jesus gave all that up in order to save us from our sin.

Rebekah's great qualities came from faith, they were fruits of her faith. May God keep growing our faith as it is fed with His Word!

## Isaac & Rebekah

<sup>57</sup> They said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her." <sup>58</sup> And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go." <sup>59</sup> So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. <sup>60</sup> And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!" <sup>61</sup> Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. <sup>62</sup> Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. <sup>63</sup> And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. <sup>64</sup> And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel <sup>65</sup> and said to the servant, "Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. <sup>66</sup> And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. <sup>67</sup> Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Genesis 24:57-67

Abraham's servant was convinced that Rebekah was the right lady for Isaac and after he told his story to her family, they were convinced too. But what about Rebekah?

Well, she certainly would go if she didn't want to! No. Marriage wasn't-and-isn't supposed to be something people have to do even though they don't want to. After all, that's not a loving way to treat anybody.

So they asked her and even though she hadn't met Isaac, she believed what the man had told her and she trusted God. Off she went.

As she arrived at her new home she saw Isaac out working. Her new husband wasn't lazy, bossing people around and making them do things for him. This was a happy sight for Rebekah.

Then the Bible says that Isaac loved her. This is more than the way he felt about her, this is how he acted toward her. God's love and the Bible's love is more than a feeling, it is action. It is doing and the Bible says that's still the love for marriage.

**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her. Ephesians 5:25**

Look at the second Bible reading, it tells husband how much they are to love their wives. They are not to be lazy and bossy because Jesus certainly was never any of that.

Jesus gave Himself up for us all. This means that in a way, all of us are like wives, Jesus is the husband to all of us and thank God for that!

When there was hard work to do for our salvation, painful work, even work that would end in death; Jesus did that for us.

He died for us and He rose for us because that's how much Jesus, the husband of the Church, loves us! *Yes, Jesus loves me!*



## Birth of Esau & Jacob

<sup>19</sup> These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, <sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. <sup>21</sup> And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. <sup>22</sup> The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. <sup>23</sup> And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger." Genesis 25:19-23

With Isaac married to Rebekah it is time for Bible to focus more on him and less on Abraham. He lived to be 175 years old and then he died. The Bible tells us he is safe in Heaven.

Life here goes one as it did for Isaac and Rebekah. Soon enough they were expecting a baby. But wait! As there seems to be all sort of tumbling and jostling going on in Rebekah's tummy she asks God and He tells her that there are two babies in there.

Twins! Twins who will wrestle and fight against each other for much of their lives. At least that explains why her pregnancy is so hard. Normally in these families of God, the oldest boy will be the one who Jesus comes from.

But in this family it is supposed to be different. This is the first of Abraham's family with more than one child and in this family the oldest is supposed to serve the youngest. In this family the youngest will have the responsibility of being the Savior's family.

Wouldn't that be hard? Who do you think it would that be harder for; Esau-the-oldest, or Jacob-the-youngest?

**For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. Isaiah 55:8**

God doesn't always do things in the way that makes sense to us, does He. After all, which of us would ever have given the world eternal life by having the maker of life die? But John 1 tells us that all life comes from Jesus and so it doesn't seem to make sense that having Jesus die can help us at all, does it?

But it does. Even though God's ways aren't ours, His ways are still right and His ways still work. You and I learn His ways in the Bible.

*Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so!*

## Naming of Esau & Jacob

<sup>24</sup> When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup> The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. <sup>26</sup> Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. Genesis 25:24-26

What is your name? Do you know why your parents gave you that name? Are you named after someone special in your family?

Sometimes children are given a name because that name has a special meaning. I have a daughter named "Nika" because the name means "victory" and we wanted that word to be part of what she is called.

When Isaac & Rebekah's children were born they had to figure out what to name them, but what? Should they be named after their father and grandfather? Maybe they should be called "Number 1" and "Number 2!"

When the day of their birth came, the first baby born was very red colored and covered in hair. They named him "Esau" because that name sounds like their word for "red." When the second baby came out, he didn't really have much hair or much color but he was doing something strange. The second boy came out of his mother so soon after Esau that he was holding on to Esau's ankle. They named this boy "Jacob" which means "tripper" or "heel grabber".

Esau was well named because he kept that reddish color all his life. Jacob was well named too because he spent a lot of his life tripping other people up. When we look at their lives we see that both these boys are sinners.

But the second Bible reading tells us about Jesus' name and about His work. **She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.**

### **Matthew 1:21**

He would be the Savior. He would spend His life to give forgiveness to Esau, to Jacob, and even to you because that's who and that's what Jesus in.

*Jesus loves me, this I know!*

## Esau's favorite stew

<sup>29</sup> Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. <sup>30</sup> And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) <sup>31</sup> Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." <sup>32</sup> Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" <sup>33</sup> Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup> Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. Genesis 25:29-34

The name Jacob means "heel-grabber", like someone who grabs your foot to make you trip, and in today's story we see Jacob doing something like that.

Esau had been outside; maybe he was hunting or hiking or maybe he was just working. We don't know exactly. What we do know is that he came inside and smelled the food that Jacob was cooking and he was so hungry that he said he might die if he didn't eat soon.

What should you do if you have food and your friend or your brother or sister is really hungry? Shouldn't you just share with them? God and your mom or dad or grandma or someone else fixed that food and bought that food from the store; if you know someone who is hungry you should share with them.

Jacob didn't. Jacob "tripped" Esau up by telling him that before he could have any food, first Esau had to trade away something that was very special to their family. This was much more valuable than a bowl of food. But it seems that Esau only cared about that food and so he made the trade.

Jacob should have shared with his brother. Esau should have cared about the things which were valuable to his family.

Have you ever been mean to a friend or family member? Have you ever "tripped them up" or tricked them out of a toy? That is a sin just like Jacob.

**For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21**

The second reading tells us about God's answer to all our sin. Instead of taking something valuable from us, Jesus took our sins. He traded His own life for ours in order that we would be forgiven and in order that we would be saved.

*Yes! Jesus loves me!*

## Isaac blesses Jacob

<sup>18</sup> So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" <sup>19</sup> Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." <sup>20</sup> But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the LORD your God granted me success." <sup>21</sup> Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." <sup>22</sup> So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." <sup>23</sup> And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. <sup>24</sup> He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." Genesis 27:18-24

This story shows us how bad families can act toward each other when they make what they want and what they think more important than what God commands. What happened was this: many years have gone by and Isaac is now very old. His vision is so bad that he is now blind. He thinks that he will soon die.

So Isaac sends Esau out hunting so that they can have a special meal together when he gives his blessing to Esau. Rebekah fixes some food that tastes the same, dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, and covers Jacob in goat hair. Because Isaac is blind, he won't be able to see that the boy saying he is Esau is really Jacob. Jacob goes along with the lie and even says it himself. When Esau finds out about all the tricks being played he promises to kill his brother.

Who do you think was the most sinful? No matter what, everybody in this family sinned didn't they? They sinned against each other and they sinned against God.

But in these people we see more than just a sinful family; in them we see a regular family. Still today husbands and wives lie to each other like Rebekah lied to Isaac. Children lie to their parents just like Jacob lied to Isaac. Family members do selfish things to each other, get mad at each other, and disobey God's commands for how we should treat each other.

It isn't right and it isn't OK but it is normal. It is normal because all of us are sinful. Sinful people will act sinfully.

But what do we do about it? How do we move past it? How do we forgive and how can we forgive others?

The second Bible reading tell us. **But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1**

It tells us that God has forgiven us and that God has forgiven our family. Here is a new way to look at each other, God's way. And here is a new way of seeing ourselves: forgiven!

## Jacob flees Esau

<sup>1</sup> Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. <sup>2</sup> Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. <sup>3</sup> God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. <sup>4</sup> May He give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!" <sup>5</sup> Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. Genesis 28:1-5

In the end the Bible's story follows Jacob; his family is the one that Jesus will be born from and so he is the person the story follows.

He's lied to his father, he's joined his mother in sin, and he has outsmarted his brother again. Esau is so mad that he says he will kill Jacob. His mom, Rebekah, tells him to run. Hurry quick and go to the land and the people that she comes from. Flee for 500 miles. Mention me, that I am your mother. Someone there will take care of you.

Off he goes. Did he cry? Did he feel guilty, after all his dad may die soon and because he made his brother so mad he might never see his dad again. What should he have said to his mom when she told him to lie? Did Jacob carry these thoughts with him as he fled?

And how would he find his way? He's never been there before! And what about just staying safe along the way?

So many questions! So many things Jacob doesn't know.

But even though he was a sinner and even though his sin is why he is fleeing, God did not reject Jacob and turn His back on this man. God had made a promise to Adam and Eve, to Noah, to Abraham and to Isaac. Jacob's sin isn't going to change God's promise.

Neither do ours. Our sins do not change the promise God has made about us. He loves us. He loves us because of Jesus.

Listen to the second Bible reading where David is talking about that: **If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. Psalm 139:9-10**

Because of God's promises, no matter where David went, no matter how far away, God would watch over him. That promise to David is also a promise to us. No matter how far away from home we have God's promise; His promise in Jesus.

## Stairway to Heaven

<sup>1</sup> Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. <sup>2</sup> Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. <sup>3</sup> God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. <sup>4</sup> May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!" <sup>5</sup> Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. Genesis 28:1-5

Jacob had to run away from home because he tricked his father Isaac and his brother Esau and Esau said that he was going to kill Jacob. Even though he ran he still had God's promise of love; a promise that the Savior would one day be born from Jacob's family.

But that promise did not mean that everything was going to be easy. After he had gone about 50 miles, probably only a few days, he lay down to sleep. He wasn't with friends or family yet, he wasn't even in a hotel, a cabin, or a tent. No. He was lying on the open ground. He didn't even have a pillow, he had to use a rock.

I've never had to use a rock for a pillow! Have you? That doesn't sound very comfortable at all! Somehow though, Jacob managed to fall asleep and that night God sent him a special dream. In that dream he saw a steps (or maybe a ladder) leading from the ground all the way up into Heaven. Angels were going up and down, between him and Heaven. At the top of the steps was God Himself promising to be with him as he stayed close to God.

In the morning Jacob was so impressed by the dream that he took that rock and stood it up like a monument.

**Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. John 1:51**

Jesus once mentioned stairs between earth and Heaven just like in Jacob's dream. Jesus described angels going up and down, but then Jesus said that He Himself was that staircase.

At first that might sound weird; but you don't have to worry that the next time you walk on stairs that you're actually walking on Jesus. No.

He's not a set of stairs but He is the connection between us and between Heaven. Because He paid for our sins, with Him we will be able to walk right into Heaven. Jesus has done it all.

*They are weak but He is strong!*

## Jacob & Rachel

<sup>15</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" <sup>16</sup> Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. <sup>18</sup> Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." <sup>19</sup> Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." <sup>20</sup> So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Genesis 29:15-20

When Jacob woke from his dream at Bethel, he continued his journey north. So far he had only gone 60-70 miles. He still had hundreds to go. One day he came across three flocks of sheep, their shepherds were waiting beside a well for the fourth flock to arrive. Together, they would uncover the well and give water to the sheep.

As Jacob talked with those three shepherds, along came the fourth, the most beautiful shepherd-woman he had ever seen! Her name is Rachel, she is the daughter of Laban, a friend of Jacob's family, even a relative from his mother's side of the family. When news of his arrival reached Laban, Jacob was invited to stay and live there. (Did he tell Laban why he left home? Did he tell him about the lies to Isaac and about Esau's promise to kill him?)

After a month passed Laban asked Jacob "But what should I pay you?"

"I will work for seven years if you'll let me marry your daughter Rachel," Jacob replied.

This proposal pleased Laban and it pleased Rachel too! She loved Jacob as much as he loved her. For the next seven years Jacob worked for Laban as a shepherd. Seven years of scorching sun, soaking rainstorms, and freezing nights. Seven years of danger from bandits and wild animals. That's not how Jacob thought of those years. No, the Bible tells us how Jacob thought of it in **Genesis 29:20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.**

Jacob's love for Rachel is a good reminder of Jesus' love for all people. Jacob didn't focus on how hard the seven years were; his eyes were set on Rachel. The Bible tells us that Jesus didn't focus on the pain and suffering He would go through in order to save us, it says that Jesus, **for the joy set before Him endured the cross. Hebrews 12:2.**

Love and marriage are wonderful gifts God gave us for this life. While these aren't gifts we will need in heaven, until then may God bless the love of all husbands and wives and fathers and mothers. One day Heaven will come because Jesus lived, died, and rose for you!



## Jacob & Leah

<sup>21</sup> Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." <sup>22</sup> So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. <sup>23</sup> But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup> (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) <sup>25</sup> And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" Genesis 29:21-25

Leah wasn't the prettiest, someone else was. Leah wasn't the favorite, someone else was. One day her little sister was going to get married. Was Leah jealous? Was she sad? Then her dad had a very bad idea; her dad Laban made a switch so that Jacob got married to Leah instead of Rachel.

Did Leah like the idea? Or did her father say he would punish her if she told anyone what was happening? Was this just a way to trick Jacob into working for seven more years? How come Jacob didn't notice who was who?

We don't know. All we know is that Jacob wanted to marry Rachel but when the sun came up the next morning, he was really married to Leah. Poor Leah. She could see that he wasn't happy. What a sad day that must have been for her.

We also know that God hadn't forgotten Leah. Even though a week later Jacob did marry Rachel, before long God blessed Leah with a baby, then another and another and another.

We'll talk more about her children in the next devotion but for now let's look at the fourth baby she had, a boy she named "Judah", a name that means "praise."

Leah was praising God because while Laban and Jacob didn't give her all the love she wanted, God heard her prayers and comforted her. Normally the ancestors of Jesus would be traced through the firstborn son but in this family it would be through Judah; an otherwise forgotten boy from a forgotten mother.

Yes, Jesus would be born from Judah's line and in Jesus we have God's proof that He loves us, that He cares about us, and that He hasn't forgotten us.

Everyone has times that are hard or that are sad. Sin and sorrow are in this world and will be until the end. Thank God that He did not just leave us! He promised a Savior who came from Jacob and Leah and from their son Judah. In Jesus God hears all our prayers. **But I, O LORD, cry to You; in the morning my prayer comes before You. Psalm 88:13**

## Jacob's Children

<sup>32</sup> And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." <sup>33</sup> She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. <sup>34</sup> Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. <sup>35</sup> And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing. Genesis 29:32-35

"Jacob & Rachel," "Jacob & Leah." One husband and two wives. Marriage is God's way of building families but this is a pretty tough way to make that start. Laban, the father of Rachel and Leah, sinned against his daughters by doing this. He sinned against Jacob and he sinned against God.

But God is so powerful and wise and loving that He can bring good out even out of something that had a tough start.

The Bible reading above tells us about four of the seven children that Leah and Jacob had. Her names for them show her hope and trust that God can bring good out of the rough start to this family; Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Names which mean "God has seen me, heard me and connected me. Praise Him!"

Rachel also had children. She named her first son Joseph and then the name of her second boy is Benjamin.

There were still more children in this family, more brothers and sisters, from two other mothers! One father but four different mothers; two wives and two ladies he wasn't even married to! And because marriage is God's way of building families, this family had a very tough start!

Maybe you know someone whose family had a tough start. Maybe you know a family having rough times right now. Maybe, sometimes, your family is like Jacob's.

Listen to what Galatians 3:28 says: **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

God is so powerful and wise and loving that He brought forgiveness and eternal life out of Jesus' suffering and death. This means that no matter how rough family times are, that He loves everyone involved, forgives everyone involved, and through that forgiveness He works to bring people together.

*Little ones to Him belong. They are weak but He is strong!*

## Jacob's prosperity / Laban's deceit

"For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" Genesis 30:30

When Jacob started working for Laban as a shepherd, he wasn't trying to make money or get rich. He was working so that he could marry Rachel.

But remember, what was supposed to be seven years turned into 14, and even more. Jacob took good care of Laban's sheep, like he says above, before Jacob came Laban didn't have very many. Now, after years of Jacob's work, Laban had lots and lots, and lots of grandchildren too!

And now Jacob wants flocks of his own so that he can take care of his growing family. He told Laban that Laban could keep all the white lambs and goats and that he would take all the spotted and striped ones. Laban thought that spotted and stiped animals were bad and that only the all-white ones were good.

Even though Jacob took the animals Laban didn't want and that he didn't think were worth anything, God blessed Jacob's flocks. They had more and more babies and the babies had babies of their own while God watched over Jacob and all his family.

If your soul were a lamb or a sheep, would it be all-white? Do you have any sins that would be like spots on your soul?

You do, don't you? All of us do because all of us are sinful. Our sins leave stains our souls and we can't wash those things away. They make our soul ugly.

In Jesus' day, there were sinful people that nobody wanted. Nobody except Jesus. In Luke 15 Jesus was criticized for being with sinful people. His answer to them said that sinful people are like lost sheep which He looks for.

And when He find that lost lamb or sheep he says this: **"Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep that was lost." Luke 15:6**

We are His sheep too and no matter what we or our souls look like, He promises to take better care of us than any of Jacob's sheep...*the Bible tells me so.*

## Jacob returns toward Esau

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. <sup>2</sup>And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. (Genesis 33:1-2)

Do you remember when Jacob ran away from home? What did Jacob do to his father Isaac, with his dad's favorite food and that goat skin? What did he Jacob do to his brother Esau, with those lies and with a bowl of stew before that?

Today's reading takes place many years after that. It is time for him to move himself and his family back home but Esau promised that the next time they saw each other he would kill Jacob.

There is nothing Jacob can do. He can't undo his sins, he can't "un-lie" to his father so that the blessing Isaac gave actually goes to Esau.

Sins don't work that way.

Jacob split his family into groups so that when Esau does come to do what he said he would do, at least some of Jacob's family won't die because of what he had done long ago.

Jacob's sins not only affected his life, but those things he did long ago are affected people he loved now, people he didn't even know back then.

Here is a very accurate picture of what sin does.

Jesus once talked to a person who was in as bad a situation as Jacob. This other man was dying because of the sins he had done. He was a robber and now that he'd been caught his punishment was death.

It was too late for this man to this man undo his sin or return the things he'd stolen. We meet him in the Bible in Luke 23 and while it is certain he is going to die and there is nothing he could do, Jesus could.

Jesus could forgive his sins so that when he died, he will be in Heaven. And that's exactly what happened. Here, look: **And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."** <sup>43</sup> **And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." Luke 23:42-43**

Jesus died on the cross to forgive the sins of that thief, and the sins of Jacob, and your sins too. One day He is going to say to you: "Today, you will be with Me in paradise."

## Jacob wrestles with God

<sup>24</sup> And Jacob was left alone. And a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. <sup>25</sup> When the Man saw that He did not prevail against Jacob, He touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with Him. <sup>26</sup> Then He said, "Let Me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me." <sup>27</sup> And He said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup> Then He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Genesis 32:24-28

Jacob divided his family into groups, hoping that some will escape the anger of his brother Esau.

Then, Jacob wrestled with a person but this man does two things no person can do; he makes Jacob's hip go (and stay) out of joint just by touching it and then he gives Jacob a blessing by changing his name.

This mysterious wrestler is God Himself! We know this because later that next morning Jacob...OOPS! I suppose we should call him "Israel" now...

Later that same morning, Israel says "I have seen God face-to-face and yet my life has been delivered." (v. 30)

While Jacob really did use his arms and legs and muscles, we wrestle with God when we pray like he did.

How did Jacob pray? He grabbed hold of God and God's promises and refused to let go. Even though Jacob's past sins are catching up with him, didn't God promise to bring Jacob/Israel back home safely on that night he saw the stairs and angels leading to heaven?

400 men with weapons were coming toward him, it was more than he could handle. Jacob/Israel stops trying to trick his way out of these messes and he trusts God to keep His promises.

God's promises for you are the same. He promises to forgive your sins. And while He doesn't promise that you'll never get sick or never that sad things will never happen, God does promise to take care of you.

2 Corinthians 1:20 says this: **All the promises of God find their "Yes" in Him.**

That's Jesus. In the morning Israel is going to have to face his brother but he will do it knowing God loves him.

The same goes for you. In Jesus you have God's blessing and promise of love...*For the Bible tells me so!*

## Jacob meets Esau

<sup>1</sup> And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. <sup>2</sup> And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. <sup>3</sup> He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. <sup>4</sup> But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. Genesis 33:1-4

What's this?!? Hugs and kisses and tears?

Didn't Jacob sin against his brother? Didn't he take advantage of Esau's hunger and of their father's blindness? Wasn't Esau coming to meet him with 400 men?

Yes...yes...and yes. All these things were true. But it was also true that Esau had forgiven his brother.

Do you remember, when he heard that Esau was coming his way with 400 men, how Jacob divided his family into groups? Genesis 32:8 says that Jacob was thinking **"If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape."**

Genesis 32 also tells us that Jacob sent many herds of sheep, goats, cows and even camels. Jacob called these things a "sacrifice" to "atone for/make up for" his sins against his brother.

What do you think? When you've done something wrong, can you undo the wrong by doing something right?

Imagine that 100 sheep really could make up for what he did to Esau but what if Jacob only had 99 sheep, would that make up for it? Would that make up for most of it but he still owed a little bit?

Or, imagine Jacob had 200 sheep, would that mean he could steal even more from Esau and just make up for it by giving more? Should rich people be allowed to sin more than others?

No. Esau told Jacob that he didn't want his brother's animals. Sin can't be atoned for with money or with work. Esau forgave his brother.

This is like what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer. There, Jesus teaches us to pray *"And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."*

*"Forgive us and help us to forgive others."*

Esau, Jacob, and you forgive because in Jesus God has forgiven us...*For the Bible tells me so!*

## Dinah, Levi, & Simeon

<sup>1</sup> Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. <sup>2</sup> And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her...and humiliated her. <sup>3</sup> And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. Genesis 34:1-3

We talk a lot about the problem of sin in these devotions because the Bible shows us the problem of sin on almost every page.

Sometimes the sins are the things that we have done wrong and sometimes the sins are wrong things that have been done to us.

That second thing is what we see in today's reading. As Jacob and his family moved back to the place where he grew up, a man living nearby attacked his daughter named Dinah.

His name was Shechem and he hurt Dinah very badly.

Now what? After hurting her, Shechem changed his mind and said that he loved her. He even wanted to marry her.

Would you trust someone who could change their mind like that? Would you feel safe?

Two of Dinah's brothers, Levi and Simeon, said that they would take care of Shechem and his sin against Dinah. But then what they did was sinful too. They were so angry that they killed him and all the other men who lived in his town!

Here is the problem of sin because now, what should the families of all those dead people do? Should they attack Simeon and Levi and all of their family?

Sin never ends and revenge is never satisfied.

Jacob stepped in to put a stop to it all; so that his daughter wouldn't be hurt anymore and so that no one else would be either.

The apostle Paul could have been talking about Shechem and Simeon and Levi when he said "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

But Paul didn't stop there because God doesn't stop just with everybody being sinful. God kept going, so Paul kept writing. Romans 3:23 says **"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and a justified by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ."**

We talk a lot about the problem of sin in these devotions but we also talk a lot about Jesus. He is God's answer, and God's end, to all of it...*for the Bible tells me so!*



## Joseph's dreams

<sup>9</sup> Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." <sup>10</sup> But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" <sup>11</sup> And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. Genesis 37:9-11

The book of Genesis was first written so that God's people would know where they came from and how they ended up as slaves in Egypt. To continue learning that story now Genesis will focus on the story of Joseph.

Remember, Joseph is the tenth son of Jacob but the first son of Rachel. So when he was finally born, Jacob showed favoritism to him. Jacob gave Joseph a very fancy and colorful coat when he didn't give any of the older brothers one.

The brothers were jealous of Joseph.

Then came the dreams. In at least two different ways Joseph dreamed that a day would come when he would have such an important job that his brothers and even his parents would bow down to him.

In his first dream he and his family were bundles of wheat. His bundle stood up and all the others bowed in respect.

In this second dream, his dad was the sun, his mom was the moon and his brothers were the stars. Like the first one, everyone was bowing in respect to him.

Dreams will play a big role in the story of Joseph. Back then, before the Bible was written, God would sometimes give people messages through dreams. People still have dreams today but as far as knowing what God says is going to happen...we are better off sticking to what is written in the Bible.

Hundreds of years after God spoke to Joseph in dreams, the disciple Peter said this: **For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 2 Peter 1:16**

We are better off sticking to what is written in the Bible. There, Peter, Paul, Matthew, John, and others tell us what they actually saw: that Jesus really did live, that He really did die, and that He really did rise again.

*Jesus loves me, this I know! For the Bible tells me so!*

## Joseph sold

<sup>26</sup> Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?" <sup>27</sup> Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. <sup>28</sup> Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt. Genesis 37:26-28

Joseph's colorful coat and surprising dreams made his brothers mad and jealous, so mad that they were willing to sin (there's that word again) in order to get rid of him.

One day while they were taking care of the flocks, he was sent to check on them. No one else was around and so they decided this was their chance.

They grabbed him and threw him into a well, which was a hole in the ground where they would get water for their sheep.

Their first plan was to kill him, rip his colorful coat into pieces, and bring it to their dad saying that they found it like that. It would look like a wild animal attacked and killed him.

But then Judah realized that if they sold him they would get rid of him and they would get money.

So that's what they did.

Poor Joseph! It wasn't his fault that his mom was Rachel! It wasn't his fault that their dad bought him that coat. How scary this must have been!

And now we get to see whether or not God can take care of His people even when bad things are happening. Maybe you know how this story turns out, maybe you don't.

Joseph was sold for 20 shekels of silver. Instead of giving the ending of this story away, let's turn to someone who was sold for 30 pieces of silver...

Do you know who that was? If you said "Jesus," you are correct. In Matthew 26:15 Judas asks how much money he would get for helping get Jesus captured.

In a sinful way of thinking Joseph was worth 20 shekels. Jesus was worth 30.

How much are you worth? 1 Peter 1:18-19 says **You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ.**

What great news! No matter what anyone else thinks or does, God sees Joseph, you, and all of us as worth His Son.

## Judah & Tamar

<sup>24</sup> About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." <sup>25</sup> As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." <sup>26</sup> Then Judah identified them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her again. Genesis 38:24-26

In the middle of all the stories of Joseph, the Bible makes a point to tell us what is happening back home where he used to live.

And what is happening is nothing good!

Tamar was first married to Judah's son. When that son died Judah was supposed to take care of her, make sure she had food and a house and other things people need.

But Judah was a very selfish man. Remember, he is the brother who said they should sell Joseph because at least then they could get some money. So, he didn't want to take care of Tamar.

That meant that she had to come up with a plan to be taken care of and sadly, the only thing she could do was to trick Judah into having a baby with her. That might sound crazy and it is but that's how selfish Judah was.

She disguised herself so that he wouldn't recognize her, dressed herself up so that she would be very attractive to him and, just like she thought, it worked!

In the reading above he has just found out that she is going to have a baby. He got really mad about that because he knew that the baby couldn't be from his son. Then Judah found out that the baby was his...

This made him see that he was much more sinful than she was. Not only had he broken the Sixth Commandment but he had also ignored Tamar and her needs.

"She is more righteous than I," Judah said. Do you think this might be a "turning point" for Judah? Do you think he might act like a different person after this?

I hope so. We'll see when we see Judah again later in these devotions and later in the Bible.

Jesus once found Himself surrounded by a bunch of people who were angry at a lady who was in a situation like Tamar. Like Judah, they wanted to punish her. Jesus said "Let him who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." John 8:7.

Actually, Jesus was the only one there who was without sin. But because He had come to pay for the sin of the world, even Tamar's and this lady's and yours, Jesus told that lady that He did not condemn her.

He says the same to you when you sin because John 3:17 says "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

## Joseph & Potiphar's Wife

<sup>6</sup> So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. <sup>7</sup> And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." <sup>8</sup> But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. <sup>9</sup> He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Genesis 39:6-9

Seeing the brother Judah in a situation of temptation with Tamar, then the Bible shows us Joseph in a similar situation...

After Joseph arrived in Egypt a man named Potiphar bought him. Now Joseph was his slave. He had to do whatever he was told. Running away and trying to get back home wasn't a good idea because he would need money to buy food and because if he was caught he would be thrown into prison.

So Joseph did his best to trust that God still cared about him and would somehow use this for something good. Joseph did his best to be faithful in the place where he ended up. It is easy to do that when everything is going well for us but Joseph is a good person for us to know about because he was being faithful even when things weren't going the way he wanted.

Then the thing in today's reading happened. Potiphar's wife didn't care about obeying God and she wanted Joseph to join her in her sinfulness.

Joseph knew that her idea was wrong and he told her so. This made her mad. Was she mad that he told her "no"? Was she mad that he cared more about her marriage than she did?

Whatever the reasons were, she was so mad that she told lies about him, said that he was the bad person, that he even attacked her.

Now, whether Potiphar believed her or not, he had Joseph sent to prison and I bet the devil was laughing when all this happened.

First, Joseph does nothing wrong with his own family and he almost gets killed, then gets sold as a slave for it, and now Joseph does the right thing again and again he gets in trouble for it!

But what do think? Should you do the right thing, tell the truth, obey your parents, only because something good will happen? If nothing good, or even something bad—like other people laughing at you—may happen, should you do the wrong thing? Should you sin?

Peter wrote about this. Peter wrote about how Jesus didn't sin or lie or get back at the people who accused Him and crucified Him. Peter says that Jesus entrusted Himself to God and that **"He bore our sins in His body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."** **1 Peter 2:24**

Peter talked about dying and living. Joseph was like that. Potiphar's wife had as much effect on him as if she were tempting someone who was dead. But Joseph was alive to God. He lived as God told him to live.

Today we see Joseph's faith in action. Your faith looks like that too. That's because Jesus bore the sins of Joseph and Peter and even your own so that you could live to righteousness.

*They are weak but He is strong!*

## Joseph, Baker, & Wine Steward

<sup>1</sup> Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, <sup>3</sup> and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. Genesis 40:1-3

What do you do when you are punished even though you haven't done anything wrong? Has that ever happened to you? Maybe someone else in your family, or someone else in your class at school, did something and you also—or maybe just you—got in trouble for it. While you should speak the truth, like Joseph did, sometimes the people in charge, even moms and dads and teachers get it wrong.

Potiphar got it wrong with Joseph but Joseph was sent to prison anyway. This will show that even in the worst places God wouldn't forget, or lose track of him.

Guess who ran the prison? Potiphar! And guess who trusted Joseph so much and knew Joseph so well that he put Joseph in charge in the prison? Potiphar!

While he was in prison, two more men were sent there, as the Bible verses above said. The Pharaoh's baker and the Pharaoh's wine steward.

We don't know what they did to end up in prison, maybe the Pharaoh—the king of Egypt—thought they were trying to put poison in his bread or in his wine.

Anyway, they both had dreams and Joseph told them that only God can truly tell what their dreams meant and that he would pray to God so that he could help them.

They each told Joseph their dreams and Joseph told them what God said they meant: good news for the wine steward, bad news for the baker.

The wine steward would get his job back. The baker would be punished by death. Things turned out exactly as the dreams, and Joseph, had said but even though Joseph asked the wine steward to tell Pharaoh about how he hadn't done anything wrong, the wine steward forgot.

Wow! Just think of all he'd been through!! Sold by his brothers for doing the right thing. Thrown into prison for doing the right thing. Now helping two strangers out and forgotten.

Does it ever feel like God has forgotten about you? Sometimes it might but that is actually impossible. In Isaiah 44:21 & 22 He says **"You will not be forgotten by Me. I have blotted out your transgressions...I have redeemed you."**

Once again that's Jesus. He's the one who "redeemed" us, who paid for our sins with His own blood. Because He did this, God will not—and cannot—forget you!

*For the Bible tells me so!*

## Joseph & Pharaoh's dreams

<sup>15</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." <sup>16</sup> Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." Genesis 41:15-16

Two years after the wine-steward was let out of prison, Pharaoh had two dreams of his own. These were weird and troubling dreams. In the first one seven fat and well-fed cows walked out of the river but they were followed by seven skinny and starving cows which gobbled up the fat cows.

The second dream was like the first. There were seven plump blossoms of grain were all growing from one stem. But then another stem sprouted with seven dry and withered blossoms and somehow the dried up withered blossoms ate up the plump blossoms.

But with neither the skinny cows or the withered blossoms got any bigger or healthier after eating. The first seven just disappeared.

When Pharaoh woke up he told his people about his dreams but none of them could figure out what they meant.

Then the wine steward remembered the man he met in prison, the man whose God had told him what his and the baker's dreams meant. He remembered Joseph.

When Jesus was being crucified two other men were being punished as well. Unlike Him, they both deserved it, they had broken the law and back then this was the punishment.

While they both deserved it, one asked God for mercy. He asked something of Jesus and Jesus said something to Him. It's here in **Luke 23:42-43 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise."**

The wine steward forgot about Joseph but God didn't. Everyone wanted to forget about that sinful man in the cross next to Jesus, everyone but God.

Sometimes you might feel forgotten, but God will not do that. Jesus' words to the man on the cross are words for us as well. He will always remember us and He always knows right where we are. Jesus dying on the cross is our proof of that.



## Joseph Rises to Power

<sup>42</sup> Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. <sup>43</sup> And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. Genesis 41:42-43

The wine steward finally remembered! As soon as he told Pharaoh about him, Joseph was brought from prison. Pharaoh asked if Joseph could tell what dreams meant and Joseph said "No, but God can."

Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams about fat cows and plump grain, and about the skinny cows and shriveled grain.

Joseph told Pharaoh that the two dreams meant the same thing. There were about to be seven years when the crops and animals would do really well; lots of baby animals and extra large harvests; seven years of plenty.

BUT... after that will come seven years when nothing grows; no food at all, seven years of famine.

Pharaoh asked Joseph what he should do. Joseph answered that he should immediately start saving food, storing all the extra away so that there would be enough to feed everybody during the seven years when nothing would grow.

Between the dreams and the good advice, Pharaoh could see that the true God was with Joseph. So right there on the spot Pharaoh released Joseph from prison and made him the second most important person in all of Egypt.

That's what we read about in our first reading.

Doesn't it sound like the second reading? Look/listen: Luke 15:22-**25 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.**

In that reading it is a sinner, a boy who was a prisoner to his own sin. Jesus tells us that God frees and restores sinners just like Pharaoh treated Joseph.

Thank God that He brought an end to Joseph's days of suffering because of his brothers, because of Potiphar's wife, and even because of the forgetful wine steward!

## Joseph Cares for Egypt / God Cares for Joseph

<sup>47</sup> During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, <sup>48</sup> and he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it. <sup>49</sup> And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured. Genesis 41:47-49

Joseph knew that it would happen just as God said it would and so as soon as he was in charge he started making plans to collect food. In fact, the Egyptians collected and stored so much food that the Bible says they could not keep count of it all.

During this time Joseph also got married and had two sons. He named his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Try to remember those names because they'll come up again later in the Bible.

Joseph was 30 years old when he explained Pharaoh's dreams. He was 17 when his brothers sold him into slavery. That means he has been in Egypt as a slave or as a prisoner for 13 years! What a long time to wait! That's a whole lifetime for someone in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade!!

Now that he is free he could go home, he could get out of this land of being a slave and being lied about and being a prisoner and being forgotten!

But...what about Egypt? God seems to have put Joseph here to that He could use Joseph to take care of all these people. If Joseph left, would the Egyptians know how to get ready for that famine? Would they get tired of saving food and stop?

God took care of Joseph through all those years in Egypt. Now, rather than running away or even getting revenge on the man who forgot him and the lady who lied about him, now Joseph has an opportunity to help others and be merciful to them.

Think about the job your mom or dad does during the day? Do they take care of you? Do they help other people get food? Do they help keep Navy ships working? Do they teach? Take a minute, right now, and talk about how their job is like Joseph. How do they show love for God by showing love for other people?

What do you want to do for a job when you grow up? How will your job help other people?

People might say that the Egyptians didn't deserve to have Joseph stay in their country and help them. Maybe they are even right in saying that but Joseph did something more like what we see in the second Bible verse today.

**Romans 5:8 God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Like Joseph, we learn how to love others by how Jesus loves us!

## Ten Visit Egypt – 1<sup>st</sup> Visit

<sup>1</sup> When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” <sup>2</sup> And he said, “Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” <sup>3</sup> So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. <sup>4</sup> But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. Genesis 42:1-4

For seven years crops and livestock multiplied so much that the Egyptians couldn’t keep track of it all; just as God had promised.

Now came the time of the famine, just as God had warned.

He’s like that isn’t He? When God says something, whether we like it or not, it is true.

But through Pharaoh’s dreams God warned about this and through Joseph’s plans God had prepared Egypt for these days. With plenty of food stored up they could help people all around them. They could even help Jacob and his family.

Jacob sent his ten older sons down to Egypt to buy food. When they arrived, Joseph recognized them. They did not recognize Joseph, after all, they did not expect that their brother they sold into slavery could be the second most important person in the whole land!

But why wasn’t Joseph’s brother, Benjamin, with them? Had they gotten rid of him too or had these brothers finally grown up?

Joseph pretended to be suspicious of them. He questioned them. He told them he thought they were working as spies to help some other nation attack Egypt, maybe to steal all the food they had stored up.

Then he had them put in jail for three days. This was enough time to get them talking and accusing each other, saying that this was each other’s fault because God was punishing them for what they did to Joseph many years ago.

They didn’t know that Joseph could understand them. Because he looked like an Egyptian, they thought he was an Egyptian.

People often mistook Jesus for being someone He was not. Because He looked like the rest of us, people thought that He could not be the true God at the same time.

But He was and He still is. Once when Jesus told a paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven, people were angry at Him because they said that only God can forgive sins.

Jesus agreed. In fact, to prove that He really is God, the Bible says: **He then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” Matthew 9:6**

Joseph didn't look like their brother but he was and in the next devotions we are going to see what that meant for them.

Jesus may not have looked like God but He was—and is—which means that our sins are forgiven.

*The Bible tells me so!*

## Two Fathers: Reuben and Judah

<sup>37</sup> Then Reuben said to his father, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." Genesis 42:37

<sup>8</sup> And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. <sup>9</sup> I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. Genesis 43:8-9

Joseph let the brothers go so they could bring the food they had bought back to their families. "But," he warned, "so that I can know that you are telling the truth, next time you had better bring your youngest brother along."

Then, on the journey home, something strange happened. When they opened their sacks of grain, all the money they had paid for that grain was there, in the very top of the sack.

Joseph had arranged for this surprise so happen so that he could take care of his family. In the position God had put him in, he could easily afford to pay for his brother's food. But between that mysterious money and his command for them to bring Benjamin, Jacob did not want his sons to return. Remember, his wife Rachel had died and he still thought that Joseph had been killed in an animal attack. He did not want to risk losing Benjamin.

Now, do you remember Reuben? He was the oldest brother, the one who wanted to let Joseph out of that well but was afraid to speak up about it. Look at the first Bible reading to see what his answer was. "Kill my two sons if I do not bring [Benjamin] back." How would you like to be one of Reuben's sons?

And do you remember Judah? He's the one who said they could make money by selling Joseph and he's the one who had to be tricked into taking care of his daughter-in-law. Look at Judah now. Rather than offer the lives of other people, Judah offers his own.

Judah seems to have learned something that Reuben has not, that true sacrifice is giving of yourself instead of volunteering to give from someone else.

Now look at this last Bible reading. **I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. John 10:11**

When we were doomed because of our sin, Jesus didn't volunteer someone else to pay for them. He volunteered Himself.

Why did Jesus do this? Because He love us. *The Bible tells me so!*

## Eleven Visit – 2<sup>nd</sup> Visit

<sup>11</sup> Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. <sup>12</sup> Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. <sup>13</sup> Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. <sup>14</sup> May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin." Genesis 43:11-14

After enough time had passed, Jacob's large family ate up all the food the brothers had bought in Egypt. They had to go back and they had to bring Benjamin with them.

Judah promised to give his own life for Benjamin's and so in the first Bible reading you can see how Jacob finally agreed.

They came back to Egypt and now Joseph saw all eleven of his brothers. He planned a big dinner for them and because he still wanted to find out somethings about them, this is what he did: First, he arranged their seats in the exact order in which they were born, oldest Reuben to youngest Benjamin. While that seemed weird to them, it might give them a chance to look down on Benjamin, maybe laugh at him for being last—if that was the kind of brothers they still were!

Second, do you remember how jealous they were of Joseph's colorful coat? Well, even though he had the last seat, Joseph made sure that Benjamin got five times as much food as everyone else. By giving Benjamin more than the others Joseph could see if they would get jealous of Benjamin even though he made sure that they all had plenty to eat.

But all went well. The brothers told how the money from their first trip had somehow ended up in their sacks and said that they wanted to pay for that now. Joseph said they shouldn't worry about it and that they were to keep their money.

It was good that the brothers weren't jealous of Benjamin when he got more food and it was good that they didn't make fun of him for having the last seat. Maybe it was starting to look like they had changed since that day they were so jealous of him that they sold him.

Two of Jesus' disciples once asked to have the best seats in heaven. That, of course, made the other disciples mad. They thought that they were just as deserving as those other two.

Here's how Jesus answered: **Whoever would be great among you must be your servant...<sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:26-28**

Like them, we sin when we look down on others or are jealous of them. Thank God that Jesus gave His life to forgive us all our sins!

## The Cup in Benjamin's Sack

<sup>11</sup> Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. <sup>12</sup> And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Genesis 44:11-12

They didn't make fun of Benjamin and they weren't jealous of him. Joseph had one more thing he wanted to see. He planned for his special silver cup to be hidden in Benjamin's bag of grain.

He let them head for home for a few hours then sent someone to stop them saying that Joseph was missing his special cup and was afraid one of these eleven men had stolen it during dinner.

Of course, none of them had actually taken it so they said that they didn't have it and if any of them did, that brother should be killed while the rest of them became servants, or slaves (like Joseph once was).

So, as the Bible reading says, they got their bags down and opened them but all of them were surprised to see that the cup was right there in the top of Benjamin's sack.

Oh no! What will the brothers do? The man who stopped them said that only Benjamin needed to go back to Egypt. He would become a slave but everyone else could go home to their families.

This was very much like what they did to Joseph. They could go home, tell their father the truth this time, saying that Benjamin must have stolen the cup and that they had no choice.

But they didn't and it was Judah who stepped forward. Judah begged to trade his life for Benjamin's. He would stay, never see his family again, become a slave, but please let Benjamin go back to his father.

A long time ago Judah did something very sinful when he helped sell Joseph and when he lied to his father. While they hadn't yet told the truth to their father, Judah didn't want to see his father suffer like that again.

In love for his father, Judah offered himself.

I pray that you already know the Bible verse found in John 3:16. **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**

In love for you, God offered His Son, Jesus. *The Bible tells me so!*

## Joseph reveals himself to his brothers

<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup> And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. <sup>3</sup> And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" Genesis 45:1-3

Was Joseph worried that they would look down on his baby brother? They didn't.

Was Joseph worried that they would be jealous of Benjamin? They weren't.

When Judah insisted that he be punished in place of Benjamin so that Benjamin could return to their father, Joseph started to cry.

These might have been tears of sorrow but they certainly also had to be tears of joy!

The Bible tells us that the brothers were stunned...and scared! Twenty two years had passed since they threw him in that well and sold him into slavery. Thirteen of those years were in slavery and prison. Seven were years of good harvest. The last two were years of famine.

Would you be mad if someone did that to you? If they made you live away from your home for twenty two years? If you had to be a slave and a prisoner for thirteen?

Joseph's brothers were afraid. They were afraid he might take revenge on them, throw them all in prison so that it would be twenty two years before they ever saw their families!

But by faith in God, Joseph saw the past twenty two years differently. He tells us how he saw it now in **Genesis 45:7-8 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> So it was not you who sent me here, but God.**

This is something that God is very good at; taking something that should be and would be bad and making it into something that is good.

Near the very end of the Bible's book of Luke, two disciples of Jesus are very sad. Three days earlier Jesus had been crucified, He died, and was buried.

They are very sad because death seemed to be that thing that not even God can change or use for something good. On that Sunday afternoon they imagined that Jesus was still dead.

But Jesus came to them and said this: **Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? Luke 24:26**

God took what seemed to be the worst thing that could ever happen, the death of our Savior, and used it for good. He used it to preserve you and keep you alive forever.

Jesus' death means your sins are forgiven. Jesus' resurrection means that one day you too will rise and be with Him in Heaven. *The Bible tells me so!*



## Jacob & Joseph reunited

<sup>2</sup> And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." <sup>3</sup> Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. <sup>4</sup> I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes." <sup>5</sup> Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. Genesis 46:2-5

Jacob must have been nervous the entire time his eleven sons were gone on the second trip to Egypt. He didn't want to let Benjamin go with the others but the ruler there insisted that they were not allowed to come back without him.

How many days or weeks passed while Jacob prayed for their safety?

Suddenly, there they were! But was that really them? They left with just their own donkeys but the group coming back home had wagons and new clothes! There were ten female donkeys loaded with grain and ten male donkeys loaded with the best treats from the land of Egypt.

Benjamin was with them and they had amazing news...Joseph! Joseph was alive! Not just alive, he was a ruler of Egypt!

At first Jacob didn't believe it but the wagons and Egyptian treats and new clothes and all the extra things finally convinced him.

Jesus once told a story about a father who, like Jacob, lost his son. But when that son came back that father said this: **For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. Luke 15:24**

That son was lost and dead because of sin. But his father loved him so much and was so happy to see him again that he forgave all the sins.

Jacob lost a son because of sin but he forgave the sins of Joseph's brothers just so that he could see Joseph again.

Do you know any of your family members who have died? Ask your parents to tell you about it. In the end we all die because of sin; it makes us unable to live with God as we are.

But that's why God sent His Son Jesus. In Jesus our sins are forgiven which means that we will rise just like Jesus did, we will be in Heaven with Him and with all who believe.

The father in Jesus' story is God the Father who loves you us much that no matter how lost and even dead we might be, He just wants us back in His arms.

*Little ones to Him belong!*

## Jacob blesses the children

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. <sup>29</sup> Then he commanded them and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, Genesis 49:28-29

Jacob arrived safely in Egypt. Joseph made sure that his father and brothers had the best land for all their flocks. The whole family was back together again.

After some time, Jacob became sick. Because he thought that he was going to die soon, he called his twelve sons together to give each one of them his blessing. The Bible also tells us that Jacob had a special blessing for both of Joseph's sons.

These "blessings" were interesting because Jacob was telling them what the future would be like for their children. For example, because Reuben once snuck behind his father's back to commit a very bad sin (Gen. 35:22), Jacob says that Reuben's descendants will not amount to anything special.

Remember when the devotion where Levi helped kill that whole village because one man in that village had hurt his sister Dinah? Because of that, Jacob says that Levi will end up serving everyone else as priests and not have a land for their own tribe.

A happier blessing from Jacob goes to Judah. None of the brothers were more sinful than he was but none of the brothers seemed to realize how undeserving of God's love, and Jacob's, than Judah.

Jacob tells Judah that the Savior is going to come from his family tree. After he blessed all twelve of his sons and at least two of his grandsons, Jacob died. The first reading tells us that wanted to be buried in the land God promised to Abraham and also to Isaac.

In 1 Peter 3:9 we read a bit more about "blessing." Peter says: **Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.**

Joseph could have repaid his brothers for their evil. Jacob could have repaid his sons for all their sins. But they didn't. They forgave because they lived with a promise that God forgave their sins.

Because of that promise Jacob wasn't afraid to die. He knew he would still be safe in God's care. He knew that one day the Savior would come who would raise him back to life to live forever!

*The Bible tells me so!*

## Last things with Joseph

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. Genesis 50:20

After Jacob's funeral, the ten older brothers became afraid. They thought "Maybe Joseph didn't get revenge on us because he didn't want to anger our father! But now that our father is gone, what will he do?"

They sent a message to Joseph about that and in the verse above we see how Joseph responded to them.

No! Their sin wasn't OK, but because God loves His people He uses all things for their good. Just think of all the people God saved from that famine by using the brothers' of selling their Joseph into slavery! They and their families were saved! So was their father! God even used Joseph to save Potiphar and his wife!

God does things like this all the time! When the Coronavirus came and all the churches had to have their services on the internet, lots of people who didn't normally hear God's Word suddenly did! Some people even got together with pastors, learned about Jesus, and were baptized!

Actually, God works through people's sinful plans all the time. The best example of this is, of course, Jesus. The religious people of Jesus' day hated Him because He talked about everybody's sin, even theirs.

They hated Him so much that they killed Him.

After that, God could have taken revenge on everyone involved. He could have wiped out the religious leaders who planned Jesus' death, the soldiers who did it, even Pontius Pilate who didn't stop it.

But He didn't. God already knew how sinful people could be. Rather than give everyone what they deserve He showed them love by having the worst thing of all happen to His Son.

In this second Bible reading Jesus is telling the people about that. **And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself."** <sup>33</sup> **He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die. John 12:32-33**

He draws and attracts people from all over the world to Himself by dying for them. Here's the good news! God does not look for ways to get revenge because of our sins. Instead, He promised to send, and has sent, Jesus!